

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VAC) Report for 19 Communities in Kono and Tonkolili Districts

Location:	Kono, Bombali, and Tonkolili Districts
Date:	2004
Sector focus:	Generalized needs assessment in post conflict situation
Spatial focus:	Village (community)

Bibliographical reference

Sierra Leone Red Cross, *Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VAC) Report for 19 Communities in Kono and Tonkolili Districts*, Freetown: Sierra Leone: Sierra Leone Red Cross, Community Reintegration and Development Project (CRDP), 2004.

Abstract

This was a rapid (3 days in each of two districts) integrated assessment of needs and resources in some of the villages most heavily affected by the civil war. This area was one of the poorest even before the war, and it received a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) because of the conflict. Focus groups and informal discussions were employed to fill in a pre-prepared matrix (log frame) that asked questions relevant to several of Sierra Leone Red Cross' (SLRC) on-going post-conflict programmes. This information was supplemented by secondary data.

A list of local hazards was compiled as well as health problems, the status of infrastructure, shelter, education, child protection, HIV/AIDS and STIs, water, sanitation, access to health facilities, common diseases, food production and marketing. On the side of capacity, the focus groups yielded an overview of the skills available (such as carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, traditional birth attendants, etc.) and natural resources (such as arable land and pasture, stones, sand, thatching material). The outcome was fed into the on-going SLRC programmes in this region of the country.

This case will be of interest to those with focused programmes and very limited time and resources. It constitutes a minimal use of VCA. The focus group process was not open ended, and no preliminary time was spent in building relationships and trust. Therefore, the only information collected was that required to fill in the log frame. In this context "vulnerability" essentially took on the limited meaning of "need" or "deficiency" and questions about "capacity" did not extend to organizational and institutional dimensions or problem solving ability. The "hazard" assessment portion did not include community mapping, and because no questions were asked about non-local processes (e.g. climate); there was no mention of drought, insect pests, animal disease, lightning and hail – hazards that are known to affect this part of Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, this case shows what can be learned of strictly programmatic significance in a short period of time.

Technical description

Hazard/risk type: Natural and anthropogenic hazards. These were highly local, village specific such as “falling from palm trees,” “bushy surrounding that accommodates snakes,” “poor ventilation in houses”, “unsafe drinking source,” and “huge trees hanging over houses”.

Other hazards identified were seasonal hunger and wild fires.

Type of assessment: Rapid village profiling, emphasizing needs over resources with a very limited functional definition of “vulnerability,” “capacity,” and “hazard.”

CRA process

Rapid rural appraisal integrating participatory elements.

Methods used: Collection and analysis of secondary data; focus groups; semi-structured interview (filling in the project log frame); direct observation.

Was livelihood analysis part of the process? No.

Was external specialist knowledge introduced? No.

Vulnerability analysis

The process was very fast (3 days) and filled in a pre-determined matrix, thus focused more on perceived needs than on differentiated household vulnerability factors such as income, occupation, age structure and dependency ratios, etc.

Capacity analysis

Resources available: *Financial resources:* Netherlands Red Cross; *Human resources:* SLRC staff; assistance by the local chief.

Limitations to capacity: Time constraints.

Action planning and implementation

What actions were actually planned? Programmatic integration of information into SLRC activities; no village based, participatory action planning.

What actions were actually carried out? Yes, Community Re-Integration and Development Project (CRDP) was launched in 14 chiefdoms in Kono District, in Bombali for 3 chiefdom, Tonkolili 4 chiefdoms; Netherlands Red Cross is funding the programme that includes water and sanitation, primary health care, and peace building activities; however, not all actions as per VCA study were included in the final programme.

Have these actions turned out to be sustainable? It is early to judge. However, conditions in post-conflict Sierra Leone are challenging for sustainability. It is likely that the SLRC and its programmes will remain foreign donor-dependent for some time and that the public financial and human resource base at the level of local government (the chiefdomships) will also be limited for some time.

Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions? Harmonization of a number of programmes within the Sierra Leone Red Cross that focus on this district including Disaster Preparedness Programme, the Community Reintegration and Development Project, Community Based Health Programme, Community Animation and Peace Support, HIV/AIDS.

Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions? Expectations of assistance were raised in the villages where interviewing took place. This may not necessarily be negative, but if unfulfilled or based on mis-perceptions and unclear communication of the purpose of the survey, this could lead to cynicism and lack of cooperation in the future.

Limitations on action/ sustainability of actions: No limitations given that there is a good deal of donor support for post-war interventions. However, in the future maintenance, replacement, and expansion of investments may be a problem.

Indicators

There are indicators implied by the categories and questions particular to each individual SLRC programme: for example, incidence of HIV/AIDS and diarrhea, number of improved latrines, etc.

Contextual notes

Existence/role of prior or contemporaneous conflict? The recently concluded civil war in Sierra Leone overshadows all development activities due to loss of lives, amputations and other long term injuries need to re-settle IDPs, disruption of economic activities and livelihoods, damage of infrastructure, and disruption of social relations and institutions. While difficult to quantify, psycho-social trauma and erosion of trust will also have an impact on development efforts.

Role of displacement/ relocation? Re-settlement of IDPs.

Role of prior disaster & prior recovery attempts? N.A.

Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences? The civil war is a powerful background influence (see above). Chiefdomship governance seems to be intact and functioning in this area, which works to the advantage of CRA and subsequent SLRC activities based on the information collected. Fertile arable land and pasture is available. There was no mention of landmines in the VCA results, so one assumes that this resource base is accessible.

Strategic notes

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at the national level? Government of Sierra Leone uses this VCA project as good example; project planning process has been improved at Sierra Leone Red Cross and also other partners; the U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Activities (OCHA) requested one of the VCAs as database for potential activities. Finally, awareness has been raised among the population generally and among national institutions with regard to disaster planning, risk reduction, and mitigation.

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at local level? Yes, through awareness raising, identification of the problems, assessment of local resources available in the communities, and awareness of local attitudes and cultural practices.

How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out? Peace building among community members and communities itself was achieved.

Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines? Less divided.

More divided along these lines? No.

Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them? Yes, certainly. Because people are more aware about their problems and speak out about them because of the established peaceful environment.

Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA? Yes, some indirectly, some directly.

Lessons learned

- ♦ CRA is feasible and very useful as a basis for multi-purpose planning in post-conflict situations.
- ♦ A single area-based CRA may serve a variety of governmental, non-governmental, local and international agencies if disseminated properly.

Keywords

Wild fire, structural fire, housing quality, health hazards, post-conflict recovery, village profiling, needs assessment, log frame analysis.

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